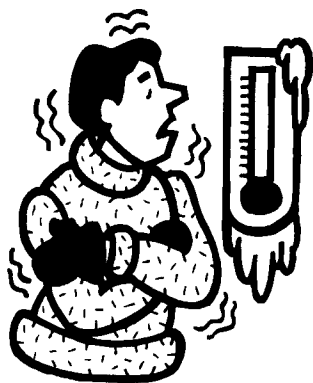


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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, February 24, 2006

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Tim Skubick: Guv's mouth gets her in bind

Child protection claim puts Granholm in backpedal mode

By Tim Skubick

For the Lansing State Journal

February 24, 2006

Talk about your double standard.

If former Gov. John Engler had misled the media on a story, he would have been convicted on the spot.

When that misdeed came from the current governor, she got a "Get Out of Jail" card

Fact: A 7-year-old boy's body was recently found near Lansing.

Fact: Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Human Services Department had investigated parental abuse charges prior to the boy's killing.

Fact: That department is understaffed with Child Protective Service caseworkers.

Fact: The governor has "repeatedly" sought to beef up the ranks of those employees.

Facts Nos. 1-3 are accurate. But fact No. 4, uttered by Granholm, turned out to be dead wrong. The governor was dragged into the death of Ricky Holland the other day because there was a bureaucratic cloud hanging over his case. The question was very clear: Was she concerned that the lack of caseworkers may have resulted in little Ricky falling through the cracks? Or, more bluntly, could his death have been avoided?

The governor started out by saying she was calling for 51 new hires at Human Services. She assured reporters her administration was committed to protecting children and if there was a problem, it would be corrected.

It was a good answer ... but it did not match the question.

So the follow-up: Since she wanted to hire 51 new workers, didn't that suggest the agency was understaffed and that could have affected the Holland investigation?

Again, she declined to address that angle, but conceded: "There is no doubt we need added personnel in that department in those areas." Then, she stuck her foot in it: "And we've repeatedly asked for additional resources."

While she never said it, the implication was obvious: The Republican-controlled Legislature never coughed up the bucks, so new caseworkers were never hired.

It was a nifty move, which shifted any responsibility in the Holland case away from her and onto the backs of GOP legislators who write the budget.

The Associated Press published the interview and soon the GOP chair of the House Appropriations committee called the executive office. Rep. Scott Hummel, R-DeWitt, was direct: The governor had never "repeatedly" asked for anything.

Turns out Hummel was right, and so was the Republican leader in the Senate.

"The governor never asked for additional funding ..." and "to use the horrible tragedy of Ricky Holland's death to score some kind of leverage in budget negotiations is in poor taste and unacceptable," said Sen. Ken Sikkema, calling Granholm on her claim.

Adding salt to the wound, Sikkema also reported the GOP, without the governor's request, had added 14 workers two years earlier.

So, here you have the governor saying one thing that was wrong, totally unaware more workers had been hired. One could conclude somebody in the front office didn't know what was going on.

To their credit, the governor's folks issued a three-paragraph statement conceding "the administration has not asked for additional resources for Child Protective Services in the past." The AP ran that story, too.

Amazingly, the concession hasn't made most of the media coverage. Go figure.

What do you think? Tim Skubick is a local television correspondent who writes a column for the State Journal on Fridays. Write him c/o Lansing State Journal, 120 E. Lenawee St., Lansing, MI 48919.

Cops: Girl, 5, a sex victim

Friday, February 24, 2006

By Scott Hagen

shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A Jackson man was arrested Thursday and accused of sexually assaulting a 5-year-old girl numerous times at a Lansing Avenue house.

Timothy P. Watson, 46, is expected to be shipped back to Jackson County from Tennessee, where police took him into custody, to face one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of failing to register as a sex offender.

Watson, 46, was released from prison Dec. 23 after completing an eight-year sentence on a conviction of sexually assaulting a 9-year-old girl in Berrien County, police said. He had been living with the victim and her mother at a Lansing Avenue house, said Blackman Township Department of Public Safety Director Tom Finco.

"It's very disheartening to us, and to society in general," Finco said.

The mother told police her landlord asked whether Watson could stay in the house she was renting. She agreed and soon learned from Watson that he had been in prison. But he told her he was convicted of having sex with a 16-year-old, not a 9-year-old, police said.

The mother received information about Watson's past from his brother after he left Monday for Tennessee. She asked her daughter if the man had touched her inappropriately. She said he had, according to a police report.

During the investigation, the girl told police that the man bought her Barbie dolls and took her to McDonald's often. She also told police he forced intercourse on her and touched her "all the time when my mommy's not here," police said.

Watson was registered as a sex offender in Michigan but his address was wrong in the databank, Finco said. Watson was arrested when he went to the Carroll County Sheriff's Department in Huntingdon, Tenn., to register as a sex offender there.

"It's a heinous crime," Finco said.

Watson could return to Michigan as soon as next week if he waives extradition. If he doesn't waive the extradition, it could take as long as a month.

Cover-up mode: House-backed FOIA exemption doesn't fix teacher records

*A Lansing State Journal editorial
February 24, 2006*

The Michigan House of Representatives is following a sad, old political formula: When you create a scandal, the next step is to create a cover-up.

On Wednesday, the House voted 105-0 for a bill to help cover up the outrageously flawed criminal background check law the Legislature passed last year.

This law, a bipartisan fiasco also backed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, created a background check mandate for education staff - without much assurance such reports were accurate. From all over the state have come stories about teachers being told they are criminals and now need to prove themselves innocent.

The errors were so numerous, they stampeded both Ingham County Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk and U.S. District Court Judge Paul Gadola into ordering the records sealed. These rulings, if eventually upheld, would create the dangerous precedent that state government can resist Freedom of Information Act requests by simply asserting that requested records aren't accurate.

Now the House wants to do its own damage to FOIA, rather than its job in protecting innocent teachers. House Bill 5675 restricts and slows the use of FOIA to get at these records.

How is this a solution? Right now, the inaccurate records are sealed off by court order, yet teachers' lives are still being trashed because of the inaccurate lists given to school districts. Lawmakers who seriously want to fix the problem would focus the bill on accuracy, not on cover-ups.

But if simple integrity won't motivate them, lawmakers should remember another old political formula: Cover-ups usually lead to far more political pain than the original scandals.

Around Metro Detroit: Capitol Report

Senate to vote on releasing sex offense data

Gary Heinlein / The Detroit News
Friday, February 24, 2006

LANSING -- The Senate tentatively plans next week to take a vote on legislation granting public access to a list of teachers and other school workers who have committed sex offenses. The bill revises an existing state law whose use has been blocked because of inaccuracies in the current list. It passed the House on a 105-0 vote on Wednesday.

"We need to review exactly what the House did to ensure it fixes what needs to be fixed -- which essentially is how the existing law is executed, not the law itself," said Ari Adler, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema. "But our initial timetable is to move it next week."

As a precaution against errors, the bill gives school districts and the state Department of Education 14 days to verify information about teacher sex crimes they receive from the Michigan State Police. Education department officials have said it may take longer to verify a record through fingerprints. The bill's sponsor, Republican Rep. Rick Baxter of Hanover, says school district officials have said 14 days are enough.

Baxter's bill makes the list subject to the state's Freedom of Information Act. The list contains names of school employees who have been convicted of a felony or a misdemeanor involving criminal sexual conduct or assault.

Republican lawmakers have pushed the legislation, House Bill 5675, to resolve court challenges blocking the release of the names of school employees who have committed sex crimes. An Ingham County circuit judge originally blocked release of the names because the list contains mistakes. A federal judge, upholding that decision, said the list is rife with errors.

Release of the records is being challenged by the Michigan Education Association. Teachers' union leaders said they fear some teachers will be misidentified, ruining their careers. State Police are preparing a new list they say will be accurate because they will use fingerprints, Social Security numbers, gender and the year of birth to verify their information. At the same time, lawmakers are completing work on HB5675.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche says it is the correct fix.

"It strikes the proper balance between the public's right to know who has access to their children and an employee's right not to be falsely accused," said DeRoche, R-Novi.

The bill currently is before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

You can reach Gary Heinlein at (313) 222-2470 or gheinlein@detnews.com.

Editorials

Criminal Records

House may release teacher list, but why delay?

February 24, 2006

Detroit Free Press

The state House took some steps in the right direction on legislation governing the release of the criminal records of public school employees. But the Senate can improve the legislation further by removing a provision that would give school districts 14 days to withhold the information.

The logic behind the 14-day delay is to give districts time to make sure none of their employees have been wrongly placed on the list. Under a law that took effect Jan. 1, Michigan school districts must fire anyone convicted of a sexual crime.

Showing concern for a school employee's reputation is important. A mistake on the list can have ugly consequences. But that prospect is less likely now that State Police are checking the list, and it should not undermine the guarantees in the Freedom of Information Act.

The House smartly struck language from the bill that would have limited the list to only felony convictions and misdemeanor sex crimes. Offenses such as drunken driving are certainly relevant to employment in a public school setting.

In both instances, accuracy is critical. But the 14-day exception is not the only way to ensure it. Lawmakers can take just as strong a stance simply by holding accountable the agencies responsible for creating the list, requiring that they double-check it before it's ever sent to the Michigan Department of Education.

If that's not time enough, FOIA already allows public institutions five business days before they must release requested public informations. In many cases, an additional 10-day extension is granted.

The goal is not to weaken the Legislature's effort to let parents know whether convicted sexual predators are working in their child's school. But it's in everyone's interest to see that Michigan doesn't go overboard.

The bill strikes enough of a balance between the public's right to know and a school employee's fear of being falsely accused without the exception that needlessly weakens FOIA.

Checked out: Poles praise background checks, but fail to support them

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Published February 21, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed a law last week that requires background checks for more health workers - background checks that impose yet another duty on the Michigan State Police.

Now, before imposing new research duties on state troopers, isn't it prudent to make sure they are equipped to handle the duties they have?

In light of recent events, it's hard to see how Granholm and the Legislature can claim all is well with the State Police and background checks.

Gaining the most attention, of course, have been the problems with criminal background checks of state educators. While the politicians were touting the protections for our children, the State Police and local school districts were left with inaccurate lists that have drawn both state and federal court injunctions.

Then, last week, the head of the troopers' union warned that Michigan could have fewer than 1,000 patrol officers by the end of September if state funds aren't found to hire more recruits. And, let's not forget that it took a supplemental budget bill last November to keep three State Police posts open - the kind of posts where teachers are supposed to go to be fingerprinted to free themselves of any inaccurate state background reports.

Now comes the health-care background check mandate. Starting May 1, the State Police will have to process fingerprint reviews for hospice and home-health workers.

Proponents, such as Attorney General Mike Cox, have noted that Michigan got a \$5 million federal grant to help fund such checks. They also have made the standard background-check political argument - that these reviews are essential for the public to know our vulnerable citizens, such as children and the elderly, are safe.

But how safe is Michigan if our politicians can't ensure accurate records?

And, how safe is the public when the results of such checks are blocked from public view?

Lawmakers such as House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novich, have argued, rightly, for release of the teacher checks now shielded by court order.

Yet that zeal for public information apparently was lost for health workers, since the new law explicitly exempts the results of background checks from the state's Freedom of Information Act. If voters were to do a background check on lawmakers' work on this issue, they would find that politicians have promised far more than they are willing to deliver with appropriate funding, staffing and procedural safeguards.

And Michigan is sure to suffer for it.

Labor Voices: Lu Battaglieri

Don't make teachers the victims of a faulty criminal registry
Push to release the list of criminals punished innocent school workers

Lu Battaglieri / Detroit News
Friday, February 24, 2006

In civics classes across the nation students are often asked this hypothetical question: "Suppose that in a group of ten persons, nine were guilty of a crime and one was innocent. Would you convict all including the innocent person or would you set all of them free in order to protect the innocent one?"

From reading the editorial pages across the state regarding the release of the list of school employees with alleged criminal convictions, newspaper editors and legislators have apparently taken the position that it is acceptable to ruin the reputations (and perhaps lives) of ninety-nine innocent people just so that newspapers could have the right to print the name of one guilty person.

The Pupil Protection Laws, a series of bills passed by the Legislature in September 2005, were developed in response to a series of articles in The Detroit News, when reporters discovered, by reviewing State Police criminal records, that there were several persons with convictions for serious crimes working in schools. The bills were passed unanimously by the Legislature and signed by the Governor in a political atmosphere where, I believe, lawmakers couldn't vote against the legislation for fear of being accused of "supporting sex offenders in the classroom."

The law calls for the publication of a list which contains the name of every public school employee who has ever been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor. A conviction for a sexual felony would result in immediate dismissal. That list, which was sent to districts two weeks ago, includes the names of hundreds of innocent employees who have erroneously been identified as felons.

To keep the grossly inaccurate list from being made public, the Michigan Education Association (MEA) requested and successfully obtained a temporary restraining order to prevent its publication. House Speaker Craig DeRoche expressed "disappointment with the MEA" for its actions. He threatened to introduce legislation to immediately release the list despite his acknowledgement that he was aware it was rife with error. In addition, newspapers harshly criticized both the MEA and the judge who presided over the hearing.

All the while, the MEA was receiving hundreds of phone calls from members whose names appeared on the list, falsely accused of crimes -- victims of mistaken identity and blatant errors in the report. To clear their good names, dozens of our members had to take time away from their classrooms. Humiliated by suspensions, they had to make agonizing trips to the local state police posts and ask to be fingerprinted so that they could put an end to the nightmare and get back to their jobs.

With the exception of parents, no one cares more about the safety of children than public school employees. Keeping individuals convicted of criminal sexual conduct felonies away from children and protecting them from predators is of paramount importance to every educator in this state.

Forcing innocent people to prove their innocence does not accomplish this goal. In fact, it violates the most basic tenet of our justice system -- one is always innocent until proven guilty. Last week, Ingham County Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuck turned the temporary restraining order into a temporary injunction against release of the list. She ruled, in part, "The comparative data recently compiled by the Michigan Department of Education, Michigan State Police, and Department of Information Technology that compares information regarding school personnel with information in the state's criminal history database is not suitable for public dissemination." Since then, editorial writers still seem to miss the point. For example, one editorial finds the price that some school employees are paying for their innocence, "shocking and abhorrent," yet it goes on to say that Judge Draganchuk's ruling is, "a bad ruling that undermines the state Freedom of Information Act."

Kudos to a judge who recognizes that the deliberate publication of misinformation is not only contrary to the intent of the law, it is also a dangerous and damaging practice.

Our children are no safer as a result of this political witch hunt, and they won't be secure until a list is released that is accurate beyond a reasonable doubt.

Personal note: This is my last editorial for the Labor Column. I have resigned as president of the Michigan Education Association to become its executive director. Iris Salters will be the new president and thus will replace me on this page. I have enjoyed writing the column, and appreciate the opportunity to do so.

Lu Battaglieri is the outgoing president of the Michigan Education Association, a union that represents teachers and education support staff. Send letters to The News at 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226 or (313) 222-6417 or letters@detnews.com.

Local schools: Offender lists full of problems

Lists of employees with criminal records were riddled with errors, school districts say.

By Justin R. Kalmes

Thursday, February 23, 2006 9:31 AM EST

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

Several local school district officials said they agree with the recent rulings of federal and state judges to block the release of a list containing the criminal records of school employees.

The list, which was the result of a new law targeting sex offenders, had to be returned to the state after a federal judge ruled Feb. 14 for its recall. In recent weeks, teachers' unions and other critics have lobbied against the release of the record because they said it was infested with errors that, should they be made public, could be harmful to employees' reputations.

"Everything on the list was a problem," said Kyle Griffith, superintendent of Morenci Area Schools. "People were mistakenly listed. It was quite a runaround, that's for sure.

"It took a lot of time and emotional energy to deal with that."

Griffith said the three people named on Morenci's list all were wrongly accused. After meeting with them individually and running their names through the Michigan State Police's criminal record database known as ICHAT, he said he determined that none of the employees had committed a crime that would have warranted their immediate termination or required school board action.

"It was a tough position to be in," Griffith said.

Sand Creek Community Schools Superintendent Donald Barnes said that of the three people on his district's list, two were mistakenly identified; the other was a former employee. He said the state didn't cross check names with the middle initials, Social Security numbers, birth dates or even sexes of those listed before forwarding the records to local school systems.

"I wish they had never released it until they had all of the facts," Barnes said.

Jim Berryman, Michigan Education Association Uniserv director, said his organization supports protecting school children from sex offenders, but believes a more accurate list should be compiled before it is released to the public so that innocent employees' reputations aren't harmed. He said school employees throughout Lenawee County have had their names on the record and they had never before been convicted of any crime.

The Legislature, Berryman said, likely didn't want the innocent falsely accused, but failed to prevent that from happening.

"When they do these things, they don't think of all of the ramifications," said Berryman, a former state senator.

Under the new law, schools, public or private, are required to fire sex offenders. Any people with felony convictions must receive approval from the superintendent and school board to remain employed.

However, even those that had committed offenses, such as misdemeanors, that didn't call for termination or review were included on the lists.

Berryman said the MEA hopes to have the law revised so that anyone falling in that category is removed from the offender record.

“Other than the reason for personally embarrassing that individual, why should their name be on the list?” Berryman asked.

Stephen Krusich, Lenawee Intermediate School District superintendent, said he's pleased districts were required to send their lists back to the state. He said the intent of the law will be better served after the Michigan State Police compiles a more accurate record.

New lists are expected to be released to local school districts near the end of March. Once that happens, the information will likely be available to the public through the Freedom of Information Act.

However, legislation moving through the state Legislature would exempt the records from being released for 14 days after schools receive the names so that officials can verify their accuracy.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

MIRS, February 23, 2006

Proposed Federal Budget Would Cost Michigan

The budget President George W. **BUSH** recently proposed could cost Michigan more than \$800 million in education, human services and energy assistance for low-income families by 2011, according to estimates compiled by the Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS).

Bush's Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 budget calls for a \$183 billion cut in domestic non-entitlement dollars over the next five years. The bulk of the cuts, about 90 percent, would take place after 2007.

If his proposal goes through, Michigan would see the following cuts in federal funding:

- \$246 million, or an eight percent cut for K-12 education from 2007-2011
- All funding for Michigan's vocational education
- \$643 million for the WIC program (the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children)
- \$29.3 million, or 14 percent from child care
- \$252 million, or 20 percent from programs that include Head Start, services for abused and neglected children and other community and social services
- \$194 million, or 31 percent from the Community Development Block Grant formula grant program. This program includes funds for economic development including road and infrastructure improvements, rehabilitation of blighted buildings and assistance for the homeless
- \$104.7 million, or 29 percent from energy assistance for low-income households

MLHS estimates the cuts would cost Michigan \$200 billion over five years because along with direct program cuts, the president's budget includes large tax cuts.

"This budget chose to cut back on education, environmental cleanup, child care and many other services Michigan needs, while making room for tax cuts that will mostly benefit affluent households," said MLHS President Ann **MARSTON**. "That's the wrong choice for our country. Congress should reject the priorities of this budget and adopt a more fair and balanced approach."

Block grant cut would hurt OLHSA

Programs, staff would have to be cut, county services director says

Friday, February 24, 2006

BY LISA CAROLIN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

The huge national deficit is taking a direct toll on needy residents in Livingston County. For the sixth year in a row, President Bush has proposed a budget that would eliminate the Community Services Block Grants (CSBG.)

"It would be devastating for Livingston County," says Catherine Rea Dunning, director of the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency's Livingston County Services. "We use that grant to create new programming. We would have to cut programs and staff, and the need in this county is greater than ever."

Rea Dunning says 30 Livingston County service programs would be affected. She says OLHSA served an average of 975 residents a month through Livingston County services including the food program, housing, Walk for Warmth funds, emergency and senior services.

I'm really concerned about the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) commodities supplemental food program, which is proposed to be zeroed out," says Rea Dunning. "We have 500-600 people in this county receiving their food every month through the USDA."

Participants are allowed to choose limited quantities of cereals, cheese, canned fruits, vegetables, meats, juices, beans and starches. Seniors like Donna Cox from Fowlerville say the supplemental food program makes a big difference for people like her who live on a limited income.

For Fiscal Year 2006, OLHSA received \$1.2 million CSBG funds, which the agency used to raise more than \$30 million that went to support its mission of helping low-income, elderly and disabled persons become self-sufficient. OLHSA Chief Executive Officer Ronald Borngesser says there are many people in both Livingston and Oakland counties facing hard times now because of the downturn in the economy and increased heating and gas costs.

"We depend on CSBG funds to help our clients, our friends and our neighbors to stay safe, warm, fed and to become self-sufficient," says Borngesser. "We need to be able to meet the ever-growing needs of our communities. Without this money, it is going to be extremely difficult for us to do so. Many people will suffer."

OLHSA was created in 1964 by both the federal and state governments. Rea Dunning says that for OLHSA to continue to exist, it's essential that federal legislators not support the CSBG cuts.

"With this huge looming national deficit, our legislators want to cut human service programs first," says Rea Dunning. "We need U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Brighton) to come out and support us."

Rogers' press secretary Sylvia Warner called the president's budget proposal "a very early step in a lengthy process."

She noted what happened last year when the president made the same proposal, Congress "approved more than \$630 million for CSBG programs."

President Bush also has called for cutting the Weatherization Assistance Program by 30 percent, which helps homes of low-income families be made more energy efficient.

Lisa Carolin can be reached at lcarin@livingstoncommunitynews.com or at 810-844-2010.

By: Anthony Martinez Beven

More seeking food aid in area

The Battle Creek Enquirer February 24, 2006

Archie MacGregor says he is getting acquainted with new people and others he hasn't seen in a while.

But not in the context he'd like.

MacGregor, pantry coordinator at the Northeast Neighborhood Pantry in Battle Creek, said the lagging Michigan economy has had an impact on the area's working poor, more of whom are coming into his pantry for help.

"Right now a lot of them are in need for money to pay their gas bills, both car and house," he said. "We're getting a lot of new ones that either haven't been here before or haven't been in here in a long time."

In 2005, MacGregor said his pantry served 1,887 more area residents than in 2004, and there was an increase of 79 babies being served from month-to-month during that period, he said.

Throughout South Central Michigan, 69 percent of food pantries served more people in 2005 than they did in 2004, said Bob Randels, executive director of the Food Bank of South Central Michigan. In 2005, 92,018 people sought help at the 272 agencies the Food Bank works with, he said.

Randels' organization is affiliated with America's Second Harvest, the nation's largest network of food banks, soup kitchens and shelters.

"About a third of those we provided services to cited they have jobs. We are seeing a pretty significant portion of people finding they need food by the end of the week or end of the month," Randels said.

A national survey conducted by Second Harvest found that 36 percent of people eating at soup kitchens, food banks and shelters came from households in which at least one person had a job. About 35 percent of those interviewed were from households that received from food stamps.

The surveys were done before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the Gulf Coast in 2005. After the hurricanes, demand for emergency food assistance tripled in Gulf Coast states, according to a separate report by the group.

"The face of hunger doesn't have a particular color, and it doesn't come from a particular neighborhood," said Ertharin Cousin, executive vice president of the Second Harvest group. "They are your neighbors, they are working Americans, they are senior citizens who have worked their entire lives and they are children."

Families, MacGregor said, "call 211 and are referred to welfare and are turned down."

MacGregor encourages public donations of canned goods, boxed items and money. He said his pantry has seen a decrease in donations from this time in 2005.

"Hunger is one of those social problems that has a cure. It is possible to cure hunger in America," Randels said, adding that about 51 percent of people visiting food pantries in South Central Michigan are from rural or suburban areas.

"It cuts against the perception ... being poor is usually an urban issue," he said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Anthony Martinez Beven covers health and features. He can be reached at 966-0684 or abeven@battlecr.gannett.com.

Originally published February 24, 2006

Hunger in South Central Michigan

The Battle Creek-based Food Bank of South Central Michigan provides emergency food help each year to more than 92,000 people in an eight-county area through 272 agencies. Here's a snapshot of the Food Bank's clients, according to a recent survey:

- About 72 percent are living below the federal poverty line
- Nearly 33 percent have at least one working adult in the home
- 28 percent said they have to choose between buying food or paying medical bills
- 12 percent of adults said they were in poor health
- 45 percent of adults said they were in poor or fair health
- 19 percent said there were other household members in poor health
- 57 percent have Medicaid coverage
- 55 percent have unpaid medical/hospital bills
- 62 percent are white, 26 percent are African American and 4 percent are Hispanic.

Source: Food Bank of South Central Michigan 2005 survey

For more information

Call the Food Bank of South Central Michigan at 964-3663 or visit the Web site at www.foodbankofscm.org

Project Linus warms kids with blankets

Volunteers aid children who are ill or in need

Friday, February 24, 2006

BY LISA CAROLIN

News Staff Reporter

Blanketeers from all over Livingston County came to Monarch Quilts in Genoa Township Feb. 18 to put their talents toward a good cause. They were part of the 7th Annual National Project Linus Blanket Day.

Project Linus is an all-volunteer organization with a mission to provide love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children who are seriously ill or in need of handmade, washable blankets and afghans crafted by the volunteer blanketeers.

Pamela Marie Heggie of Oceola Township started the local Project Linus chapter last November.

"I have used word of mouth to spread the word about the group," says Heggie. "My intention is to work with people in the county like hospitals, police stations, and LACASA who may need blankets. When the national organization puts out a call for help like it did for Hurricane Katrina victims, I want to help on an as-needed basis."

Dozens of blankets were made and others dropped off at Monarch Quilts.

"I've been here all day," said blanketeer Elizabeth Lorge from Hamburg Township. "You don't need to have sewing experience to make blankets. The fleece ones are easy to make."

Jane Clark, who owns Monarch Quilts, says anyone who wants to donate blankets to the Linus Project can drop them off anytime at her store.

"I think it's a great organization, and I want to help support Livingston County," said Clark. "It's nice to give back."

There are 360 chapters of Project Linus in the U.S. that have combined to donate more than 1.5 million blankets to children in crisis.

Heggie, who works full time and has two young children, hopes to start holding monthly meetings for the local Project Linus chapter.

"If I can help one child feel less of the pain I felt growing up, it will be worth it," she says.

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Food-pantry use climbed last year

Tuesday, February 24, 2006

cricks@kalamazoo Gazette.com 388-8557

Monica Gates appreciated the offer of peanut butter and jelly, but that was one staple she and her 4-year-old daughter Gage had in good supply.

Other basics like bread, eggs and cereal the Kalamazoo mother gladly accepted.

Gates, 26, left a food pantry at Chapel Hill United Methodist Church in Portage with four bags of groceries Thursday. She said she hoped the free food, provided by Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes, would tide her over until her monthly allotment of food stamps arrives in March.

"The price of food is getting more expensive. The economy is crappy and I'm not working," said Gates, who said she recently became unemployed. "I like to buy fresh produce. I want my daughter to have healthy stuff, but that's expensive."

Last year, the Food Bank of South Central Michigan supplied more than 5 million pounds of food to 272 agencies, including Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes, to feed more than 92,000 people. More than 35,000 of those recipients were children, according to a report released Thursday titled, "Hunger in America 2006."

The report was based on surveys of thousands of agencies that provide emergency food assistance across the nation and from 52,000 face-to-face interviews. The local portion of "Hunger in America" is based on interviews of 424 residents at 39 sites served by the Food Bank of South Central Michigan, which serves eight counties, including Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Barry.

"It is tragic that so many people are relying on emergency food assistance in the United States, where we produce enough food to feed every hungry person in the world," said Bob Randels, executive director of the Food Bank of South Central Michigan.

Randels said the "Hunger in America" report produced a snapshot of who is being served by his food bank.

Among its findings: Fifty-seven percent of all adult clients are female and 43 percent are male; 62 percent are white and 26 percent are African-American; 51 percent live in suburban/rural settings; and average yearly household income for those served was \$10,490.

Forty-three percent of clients surveyed said they chose between paying for utilities or heating fuel and food, 41 percent chose between paying for rent and mortgage and food, and 28 percent had to choose between paying for medical bills and food, it said.

During its 2004-2005 fiscal year, Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes provided more than 67,000 two-day supplies of groceries to area residents through its emergency grocery program. That represented a 4 percent increase over the previous fiscal year.

The agency has a network of 20 church- and community-based food pantries throughout Kalamazoo County. It also supported more than 92,000 meals through the soup kitchen at Ministry With Community and more than 63,000 meals at the YWCA's Domestic Assault Program.

Anne Wend Lipsey, executive director of Loaves and Fishes, said the value of the Hunger in America report will lie in its ability to convince policymakers, taxpayers and citizens that hunger is a pressing problem. "As many people as we serve today, there are people who aren't getting food who need it," she said.

Gains cited in minority health care

Friday, February 24, 2006

By Rick Wilson

The Grand Rapids Press

KENT COUNTY -- Virginia Moralez is convinced the \$500,000 that Kent County has spent since 2002 identifying barriers to health care for minorities has meant some of the 4,200 patients she sees monthly at two Grand Rapids clinics are getting better health care.

But as a medical service provider to low-income county residents, Moralez -- who manages the Browning/Claytor Health Center on Madison Street SE and Clinica Santa Maria on Grandville Avenue SW -- said the initiative has brought a national problem into focus for local medical providers. The initiative was intended to address statistics showing minorities fare substantially worse than whites in getting health problems diagnosed, treated and cured.

"Even though we're making progress, because we're looking at the problem we know is there, we still have a long way to go," Moralez said. "This has been a big step in the right direction because, if we hadn't studied this, the disparity would have been worse than it was."

The Kent County Commission on Thursday heard a final report on its Task Force on Health Care for People of Color initiative launched in 2002 after a U.S. Census report revealed infant mortality rates in the county were about three times higher for blacks than whites. Teresa Branson, who coordinated the initiative, told the commission Thursday how 23 county clinics banded together by the end of last year to provide services to about 56,000 Kent County residents.

She said the consortium spawned several programs providing low-cost prescription drugs, specialist exams and screening for diabetes, among other services. One program garnered volunteer contributions from 262 primary care physicians and 145 specialists, who have provided free care valued at \$282,000 since April.

"The programs are reaching people who have never before received this kind of care," said Amy Morris, spokeswoman for the Kent County Health Department.

The programs also included cultural sensitivity training for health-care workers, a health awareness campaign targeting minorities, and the Single Access Initiative. Under that program, patients can call the Rapid dispatch center beginning in May to arrange rides offered by various social service agencies to and from medical facilities.

"This is money well spent," said Commissioner James Vaughn, D-Grand Rapids.

Levin: Most should sign up for flawed Medicare drug plan

Stuart Frohm, Midland Daily News

02/23/2006

Sen. Carl Levin thinks lawmakers might improve the Medicare prescription drug program this year.

But don't wait for that, Levin told senior citizens in Midland Wednesday. Most senior citizens without prescription coverage should sign up for it under Medicare's program, Levin said.

He saluted Midland County Senior Services and other programs that help senior citizens decide which of the dozens of prescription drug programs is best for them.

Military veterans and some retirees and their spouses might be getting a better deal than they would from the Medicare prescription drug program, Levin said.

Low-income Medicaid recipients and some others also got a better deal before lawmakers added the prescription drug benefit to Medicare, he added.

Levin voted against the Medicare prescription drug program because of what he considers its shortcomings. He and Debbie Stabenow, Michigan's other Democratic senator, are two of the lawmakers trying to change the law.

A proposal that's the most likely to become law is extension of the May 15, penalty-free enrollment deadline, Levin said.

His and Stabenow's proposed Senate Bill 2240 would:

- * Specify that there will be no negative consequences to pharmaceutical companies that provide discount cards to lower-income seniors.

- * Prohibit insurance companies from removing drugs from their Medicare plans' lists of covered drugs until January 1 of the following year. That would give seniors the chance to change plans during open enrollment periods.

- * Waive copayments for people who were moved from Medicaid into the Medicare prescription drug program.

- * Allow the federal government to use its bargaining power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices with pharmaceutical companies.

Levin spoke to about 35 people and answered questions from some of them at Midland County Senior Services' office, 4700 Dublin Ave.

He has held such sessions elsewhere in Michigan. His office reported it has been inundated with calls, letters and e-mail from people across Michigan voicing concerns about inadequacies of the Medicare prescription drug program since it went into effect in January.

Midland County Senior Services -- which reportedly has helped more than 2,000 people regarding the Medicare drug program since October -- can be reached by telephone at 633-3700.

Gongwer
February 23, 2006

LONG-TERM CARE EXAMINED BY HOUSE COMMITTEE

Providing information and access to long-term care for Michigan residents who need it was the focus of the House Medicaid Reform and Innovation Committee meeting Thursday, as members heard the case for single point of entry agencies and the ups and downs of long-term care insurance.

Providing choices and information in a time of crisis, when most people decide what long-term care their relative may need, is important to ensuring people are not placed in the appropriate facility or at home, said RoAnne Chaney, chair of the governor's Long Term Care Task Force.

While there is no one solution to providing better long-term care, Michigan is perhaps in a good situation only for the fact other states have implemented a variety of programs and leaders can work off those models, said Susan Steinke, vice chair of the task force.

The task force gave a report in 2005 outlining its recommendations to improve the system. However, committee Chair Rep. Gary Newell (R-Saranac) said members are still questioning the aspects of a single point of entry system and what benefits there might be for long-term care insurance, which was applauded by another presenter, Tom Meyer, administrator for the Iosco County Medical Care Facility.

But without upgraded consumer protections, people could be purchasing long-term care insurance without knowing about the exemptions that come with it. Ms. Chaney said that it does not cover people with disabilities nor does it provide service for people who have been treated for depression.

However, making the insurance more affordable also will help people take personal responsibility in looking at their long-term care needs, Mr. Meyer said.

Representatives from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan were also to present at the meeting, but time ran over and Mr. Newell said they could come back at another hearing to provide information to members.

In terms of a single point of entry system, (legislation has been introduced in the House to establish those agencies under the Department of Community Health), presenter Dann Milne, a health policy consultant, said programs that have seen success are based upon on an assessment of a person, a plan devised by the coordinator and family to take care of the person and a follow through of repeatedly checking up on the person.

"Making this individual connection with that part of the healthcare system has been critical," he said.

NEWS IN A MINUTE: OAKLAND
Detroit Free Press
February 24, 2006

ROYAL OAK: Jaycees are still taking donations to help homeless

Members of the Royal Oak Jaycees managed to survive a night outdoors last Friday and raised about \$700 to aid homeless people in Oakland County.

About two dozen members of the service club gathered last week at 11 Mile and Woodward, on the lawn of St. John's Episcopal Church, to dramatize the plight of homeless people and to raise money for the South Oakland Shelter, based in Royal Oak.

Only three of the hardiest Jaycees stayed the entire night, bundled into sleeping bags spread over tarps on the grass as temperatures in the county slid to a low of 1 below, with a windchill of 10 below to 20 below, according to the National Weather Service.

One of them was Bob Doyle, 30, of Royal Oak, a General Motors Corp. environmental engineer who helped conceive the event.

"At around 2:30 or 3 in the morning, we got into our cocoons and tried to fall asleep, which we couldn't. We were actually warm, but the wind was just whipping," Doyle said. There was another reason.

"Starbucks had dropped off a lot of coffee, and I probably had seven or eight cups," Doyle admitted Wednesday. He said he's still warmed by the thought of two once-homeless people, now employed, who stopped to give donations and thank his group.

At a Royal Oak City Commission meeting next month, the Jaycees plan to turn over their donations to the South Oakland Shelter, he said. Until then, people can still donate at www.royaloakjaycees.org.

By Bill Laitner

Board pledges wide changes at Highfields

Ingham judge: Youths will not return for months

By T.M. Shultz

Lansing State Journal

Published February 24, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Highfields will devise a plan within three weeks to fix problems at the facility, its board of directors told Ingham County family court judges Thursday.

The move comes in the aftermath of allegations of mistreatment at the residential treatment center for troubled boys, located in rural Onondaga.

The plan will emphasize safety and updated programs, Chairman Charles Corley said. He would not elaborate.

The board's promise came after a 90-minute meeting in Lansing with court officials. It was the first time Highfields officials and judges had talked face to face since the allegations came to light.

"We had a great exchange," presiding Family Court Judge Janelle Lawless said. But she said it likely will take several months before Ingham County youngsters return to Highfields.

Earlier this month, both the county and the state Department of Human Services pulled their clients from Highfields.

Shortly after that, Highfields temporarily closed its residential programs, which treat youths ages 12 to 17.

Highfields President Jim Hines did not attend Thursday's meeting, Chief Probate Judge George Economy said.

Economy had requested Hines not be present, so the board could talk freely. Probate Judge Richard Garcia has called for Hines' removal, but Economy said Highfields' board of directors should decide that.

Asked after Thursday's meeting if he still was calling for Hines' removal, Garcia said, "That's in our past now. We have to get to the next level."

But he added that he stood by his previous comments.

"I think the court and the board will work together to make the dramatic changes needed," Garcia said.

Thursday's meeting was an eye-opener for the board, Corley said.

"Perhaps we were perceived more negatively than we thought," he said.

Mark Nixon, editorial page editor for the Lansing State Journal, is a member of Highfields' board. To avoid a conflict of interest, Nixon has recused himself from board meetings.

The judges removed their clients from Highfields - which has been known for turning young people's lives around - after two allegations of mistreatment.

After a check of state records, court officials found additional allegations of mistreatment - some substantiated - about which they had not been told.

After investigating one of the two most recent allegations, Highfields fired two employees for taking a boy outside at night for 30 minutes without a coat and marching him around. When one of the counselors grabbed the youngster, they both ended up in the snow.

Another counselor's role in a separate incident - in which it's alleged that a youngster was harassed by other boys - is being investigated, Corley said.

But Judge Garcia said he's already held a hearing on that issue and considers the allegations substantiated.

In both incidents "...something happened that shouldn't have," Hines has said.

The judges say the real issue is accountability and proper training.

They say national standards prohibit physical punishment or physical intervention of any kind unless someone is in danger or trying to escape, and that's what they want to see at Highfields. Contact T.M. Shultz at 377-1061 or tshultz@lsj.com.

Ongoing investigations

- The Ingham County Sheriff's Office is investigating whether criminal charges should be brought against Highfields employees.
- The state Department of Human Services is conducting investigations into Highfields' license and into its contract with the state. Preliminary results prompted the state to remove its clients earlier this month for safety reasons.
- Ingham County Family Court is conducting its own investigations.
- Highfields is investigating an incident involving a youth who alleges he was harassed by other youngsters.

Highfields: County actions are appropriate

*A Lansing State Journal editorial
February 24, 2006*

Ingham County judges and commissioners have acted appropriately on information they have about problems at Highfields, a local facility for troubled youth.

The judges have removed youths they have sent to the facility, in the wake of substantiated claims of abuse. The Board of Commissioners, meanwhile, canceled payments on its \$2 million contract with the center.

It would be a huge loss for the community if this scandal led to Highfields' end. Much good has been done there.

But people in charge of children have to be held to high standards. They must have proper training and oversight.

The multiple investigations into Highfields may uncover more unpleasant facts. That's necessary, though, since without the facts, how can improvements be made?

And, let's be clear, without the public confidence that would result from improved oversight, improved training, improved accountability, there will not be a relationship between Ingham County and Highfields.

That is the lesson of the last week: The status quo at Highfields is unacceptable. Until it changes, the county's only option is to look elsewhere for help for our troubled youth.

DETROIT: Detroit boy, 14, charged in accidental shooting

A 14-year-old Detroit boy was charged Wednesday with careless and reckless use of a firearm resulting in injury. He allegedly shot his 16-year-old cousin in the leg by accident last weekend. The victim was hit in the calf and hospitalized briefly but did not suffer any serious complications, his stepfather told Wayne County Family Court Referee David Perkins on Wednesday.

The victim's stepfather, several members of the 14-year-old's family and neighbors came to the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility to support the 14-year-old, said the boy's attorney, Mark Magidson.

The boys were in the 14-year-old's bedroom at his home in the 20000 block of Hamburg in Detroit on Saturday afternoon when the 14-year-old pulled a .22-caliber pistol from under his bed. Magidson said the gun did not belong to either boy's parents and his client had found it somewhere.

The gun accidentally went off after the 14-year-old unloaded it and reloaded it, according to a police report filed in court.

By Jack Kresnak



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Wayne County collaborative receives \$150,000 Great Start Collaborative grant

Early Childhood Investment Corporation grants focus on early childhood development and care

February 24, 2006

WAYNE – Today the superintendent of the Wayne RESA will join board members of the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) and local legislators to celebrate a \$150,000 grant to support a local Great Start Collaborative that will strengthen early childhood development and care in Wayne County.

Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow and ECIC chief operating officer Mike Foley presented a ceremonial check to Dr. Marlene E. Davis, Wayne RESA Superintendent.

From the day she took office, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has maintained that early childhood development and care is a critical investment in the economic viability of the state.

"Children learn more from birth to age three than at any other time, setting the stage for future success in school and in life," Granholm said. "High-quality early childhood development and care is a wise investment in our children and our economy."

The Early Childhood Investment Corporation, which the Governor announced in her 2005 State of the State address, is developing the framework for effective early childhood development and care programs through partnerships with local collaboratives around the state. The local Great Start Collaboratives will use the grant money from the ECIC to conduct a community assessment and develop a strategic plan for the development of a comprehensive system of early childhood services and supports, accessible to all children from birth to kindergarten and their families.

"These grants will help bring together the public and private sectors, including government, business, civic, faith, education, and community groups to develop a long-standing, sustained focus on early learning and childhood development," said Mike Foley. "The board was able to award this first round of grants with the resources currently available, and is committed to funding Great Start Collaboratives throughout the state as new funding sources are identified."

Intermediate school districts will act as fiduciaries for the grants. In addition to Wayne RESA, 13 other ISDs and RESAs around the state were also awarded funding for planning and/or implementation of Great Start Collaboratives.

-MORE-

“Children who participate in high-quality early childhood development programs are better prepared to enter elementary school, are more likely to pursue secondary education and have lower dropout rates and higher high school graduation rates,” DHS Director Marianne Udow said. “By improving the skills of a large fraction of the workforce, these programs for poor children will reduce poverty and strengthen the state’s ability to compete in the global market.”

For more information about the ECIC and Great Start collaboratives, visit the Project Great Start Web site at www.michigan.gov/greatstart

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Community members give Walk for Warmth big boost

*By Roland Stoy/Coldwater Daily Staff Writer
February 24, 2006*

BRONSON — It was a nice day for a walk.

And it was a nice walk for an important cause, as local radio manager and personality Ken Delaney and regional Community Action Agency regional CEO Don Mercer out of Battle Creek traveled by foot on US-12 from Bronson to Quincy Thursday to gain contributions for the annual Walk for Warmth campaign.

Mercer talked to an assembly of the Chicago Street School student body about the importance of their work before setting out with Delaney and principal Mark Heifner.

Walk for Warmth defies cold day

OLHSA raises nearly \$40,000 to help needy pay heating bills

Friday, February 24, 2006
BY LISA CAROLIN
News Staff Reporter

Hundreds of people came out to the Walk for Warmth in Livingston County Feb. 18 on what was one of the coldest days of the year.

More than 300 people participated in the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency's 16th Annual Walk for Warmth, and the agency raised close to \$43,000. Catherine Rea Dunning, director of OLHSA's Livingston County Services, said the need for help with heating bills has increased in Livingston County because of the increase in the cost of natural gas and propane.

Walk for Warmth is OLHSA's only fundraiser of the year. All the money raised will go to people in need of emergency energy assistance in Livingston County. To receive assistance, a family must live in the county, have a gross income less than \$38,700 for a family of four, have a utility shut-off notice or be almost out of heating fuel.

"This seems like a worthy cause," said participant Ruth Cook, a co-chairwoman of the team from First National Bank. "We have 38 people on our team and have raised at least \$3,000."

The Elder Beerman store in Genoa Township had a team of 20 called BRAVO-BonTon Retail Association Outreach. It raised \$1,500.

"It's a good cause and it's greatly appreciated especially on a day like today," said Elder Beerman employee Gail Thierry.

The Howell First United Methodist Church was participating in the Walk for Warmth for the first time.

"I'm a retired minister and have had many people ask for help with their heating bills," said church team member Alan DeGraw. "Today's cold weather reminds us why we're doing this."

"I'm walking today to help people get heat," said Hannah Munzenberger, a fifth-grader at Bartlett Elementary School in South Lyon, which came with its own team.

Charle Kline, Girl Scout Leader of Troop 1413 from Hartland, said, "My girls didn't imagine that community service could be this much fun."

Not all the participants could walk. A team from the Howell Care Center Nursing Home participated in their wheelchairs. Marlene Reed, president of the resident council, put the team together in the early 1990s.

Rea Dunning announced awards prior to the walk. Kim Danes, general manager of the Tanger Outlet Mall, received the Community Partner Award and Jeanne's Team, friends and family walking in memory of Jeanne Dolan, received the first Walk Team Award. Her husband, Dennis Dolan, a member of the Livingston County Board of Commissioners, said the Walk for Warmth was one of Jeanne's favorite events.

Last year's Walk for Warmth raised \$32,000, which ran out in September of 2005 after the money went to assist 280 Livingston County families.